



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex
2127 SE Marine Science Drive
Newport, OR 97365



October 30, 2003

Invitation for Public Involvement Environmental Assessment - Predator Damage Management to Protect Seabird Colonies on Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and Adjacent Mainland Areas

You are invited to participate in the public involvement and planning process for the development of an Environmental Assessment to protect resident seabird colonies from mammalian predation on Oregon coastal islands. Mammalian predator species of concern include the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), feral cat (*Felis domestica*), rat (*Rattus spp.*) and raccoon (*Procyon lotor*). During 2001 and 2002, mammalian predator species caused the failure of two breeding colonies of seabirds on Middle Coquille and Elephant rocks within the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

Why start now? The Need for Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex manages six National Wildlife Refuges, two Wilderness Areas, and a Research Natural Area along the Oregon coast. Two of these refuges, Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge and Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, provide key nesting habitat and protection for the majority of the 1.2 million nesting seabirds in Oregon. Seabird nesting colonies on Middle Coquille Point, Elephant, and Haystack rocks near Bandon have recently been negatively affected or eliminated by mammalian predators.

Mammalian predators, particularly non-native species, have had devastating negative effects on nesting seabird populations throughout the world. Red foxes, feral cats, rats, and raccoons can decimate ground and burrow-nesting bird populations (Emlen et al. 1966, Kadlec 1971, Sargent 1978, Maccarone and Montevecchi 1981, Atkinson 1985, Southern et al. 1985, Keitt et al. 2002). Impacts to seabirds include direct predation of eggs or young, reproductive failure, detrimental alteration of habitat, destruction of nesting burrows, and complete abandonment of nesting colonies. Mammalian predators that have the potential to affect or have already seriously affected Oregon's seabird colonies include the red fox, feral cat, rat, and raccoon. If these species were to become established on or around Oregon's coastal headlands, rocks, islands, or reefs, the effects could be catastrophic to the native species of seabirds.

During 2001 and 2002, red fox caused the failure of seabird nesting on Middle Coquille Point and Elephant rocks within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS, unpublished observations, 2001-2002). Red fox were observed loafing in or near the entrances of nesting burrows of tufted puffin (*Fratercula cirrhata*) and pigeon guillemot (*Cephus columba*) and in the area of ground-nesting western gulls (*Larus occidentalis*), Brandt's cormorants (*Phalacrocorax*

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penicillatus), and double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) (R. Lowe and D. Pitkin, personal communication). Red fox were also observed eating and burying western gull eggs. Surveys of seabirds conducted between 1979 and 2000 on Middle Coquille Point and Elephant rocks indicate breeding by numerous species, while observations from 2001 and 2002 seasons show a failure of production or complete absence of breeding attempts (USFWS, aerial and ground seabird surveys). During the 2003 nesting season, no red fox were observed in the area, and nesting western gulls, pigeon guillemots, and black oystercatchers (*Haematopus bachmani*) successfully bred on the rocks (USFWS, unpublished observations). A number of seabird species such as tufted puffin and Brandt's cormorant, which historically bred on Middle Coquille Point and Elephant rocks were observed in the area, but continued to restrict their breeding efforts to islands not accessible by red fox.

The majority of Oregon's seabird colonies are physically isolated offshore, which provides a measure of protection from predatory mammals. However, nearshore sites, such as those at Coquille Point where impacts to seabird colonies have already been documented, are accessible to mammalian predators during periods of low tide, or by human introduction. Compared to Coquille Point, much larger seabird colonies occur at other easily accessible locations along the Oregon coast, including those at Crook Point and Yaquina Head, for example. Over the last two decades, the USFWS has worked extensively to preserve and protect Oregon's nesting seabird populations and habitats. These efforts have included maintaining and enforcing a closure on all rocks, islands, and reefs along the Oregon coast to prevent disturbance, habitat destruction, and introduction of non-native species. Other measures include land acquisition, creation of buffer zones and aircraft restrictions, oil spill response planning and spill response, and conducting wildlife surveys. In addition, the USFWS works to protect and conserve the natural resources of coastal Oregon with extensive public outreach, education, interpretive programs, and law enforcement efforts.

The following cooperating agencies have been working together to manage habitat, recreation impacts, and predation impacts:

U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service,
Wildlife Services
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

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Where would the proposed action occur?

The selected actions could occur within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas from Tillamook Head in Clatsop County south to the California border. The selected actions would generally occur west of Highway 101.

What do we want to accomplish?

Objectives

The primary objective of the proposed action is to implement predator damage management to prevent further declines of seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas. The proposed action includes the following primary goals:

- 1) Assess mammalian predation impacts on seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas.
- 2) Reduce predation where mammalian predators have been determined to be a threat to populations of seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas.

Predator damage management will initially focus on Coquille Point and adjacent mainland areas. As other areas within the proposed project area become negatively affected by mammalian predator species, they will be managed accordingly.

What is the decision to be made?

Decision to Be Made

The USFWS is the lead agency for the proposed action. The USFWS and cooperating agencies together will address the following questions based on interdisciplinary analysis in the proposed Environmental Assessment.

- How can the USFWS and the cooperating agencies best respond to the need for action to protect seabirds from mammalian predation within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas?
- What might be the environmental effects of implementing the various alternatives?

What do the agencies want to do?

Proposed Action

The proposed action is to implement an integrated predator damage management program using the most effective, selective, and humane tools available to deter or remove the mammalian species responsible for predation of seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife

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Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas. The proposed action considers non-lethal methods before lethal methods. The following tools would be available as possible options:

Non-lethal tools could include any or all of the following depending upon the circumstances: live trapping; aversive methods that harass or deter predators such as pyrotechnics, electronic calls, repellants or effigies; electrified or non-electrified exclusionary fencing; exotic vegetation removal; trash management; beach carcass removal; and public education/outreach.

Lethal tools could include any or all of the following depending upon field circumstances: shooting; euthanasia in conjunction with cage traps, leg-hold traps, or nets; snap traps; gas cartridges/fumigants; snares; denning; or rodenticides.

What else could be done?

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

1. No action. This alternative would maintain the status quo, and no predator damage management would occur. Some habitat modification and/or vegetation removal, trash management, and public education and outreach have been in place as part of on going National Wildlife Refuge management.
2. Non-lethal methods only. This alternative would allow for the use of only non-lethal methods to prevent or deter predators from the proposed action area. Any or all of the non-lethal efforts that are listed under the proposed action would be considered and could be used.
3. Non-lethal before lethal. This alternative differs from the proposed action in that it would *require* that non-lethal methods be used first, and lethal methods would only be used if non-lethal methods are found to be ineffective. Any or all of the non-lethal methods that are listed under the proposed action alternative could be used, and in theory, any or all of the lethal methods could also be used afterwards.

Who are the cooperating agencies?

Cooperating Agencies

In addition to the USFWS, this proposal would require the participation of other agencies that have management authority and expertise related to this project. The USDA Forest Service (USFS) and USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have the responsibility to manage federal lands under their jurisdiction. Both the USFS and BLM recognize the importance of managing wildlife damage on lands and resources under their jurisdiction, as integrated with their multiple use responsibilities. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has management authority for all wildlife in Oregon, regardless of the land class on

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which they are found (ORS 496.124). The Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation (OPRD) is responsible for regulating activities on the ocean shore and managing state park properties along the coastline within the proposed action area. The USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Wildlife Services program is authorized by Federal law to provide leadership and assistance in wildlife damage management.

What are the Areas of Concern?

Issues that may drive the analysis

Issues drive the analysis and are used to compare the environmental impacts of the various management strategies. Based on similar analyses, the lead and cooperating agencies have determined that the following issues may be important for the analysis. These questions and/or others may be answered in the Environmental Assessment.

- What effects would the proposed action and alternatives have on mammalian predator species? How would the management strategies affect local or regional populations of mammalian predators?
- What effects might the proposed action and alternatives have on threatened and endangered species, pets, and other non-target animals?
- How might the proposed action and alternatives affect public safety?
- How do the public and technical experts perceive the humaneness of the various lethal and non-lethal methods?
- What effects might the proposed action and alternatives have on the aesthetic values that wildlife offers to recreationists or residents?
- How might the proposed action and alternatives affect recreation or other land uses?
- What would be the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the proposed action and alternatives?

The Environmental Assessment will compare the relative effectiveness of the alternative strategies in protecting seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas impacted by predation. Based on comments obtained through this public involvement process, other alternatives and issues may be included in this analysis, or the alternatives and issues listed above may be modified.

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How can you get involved?

We encourage you to help by answering the following questions. All of the information we receive will be considered in the analysis process.

1. What is your relationship (recreationist, concerned citizen, etc.) to the proposed project or to the potential environmental impacts of predator damage management to protect the seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas?
2. What *issues* do you think are important to consider in this analysis? What are your concerns with predator damage management and protecting seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas?
3. How do you desire and expect predation to be managed? Which of the four proposed *alternatives* (management strategies) should we consider for resolving seabird predation?

We invite you to send written comments on the proposal to the address below. Because time is of the essence, **comments must be received by November 24, 2003**, to ensure full consideration in the Environmental Assessment. Faxed comments should also be mailed. You may also e-mail comments to the address listed below. If we receive your comments or an indication of your desire to remain informed, we will notify you of the availability of the draft Environmental Assessment. Please be sure to include your return address on any correspondence.

Where do you send comments?

Address comments to:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex
2127 SE Marine Science Drive
Newport, OR 97365
e-mail: orseabirds@fws.gov
phone: 541-867-4550
fax: 541-867-4551

Thank you for taking the time to read this notice. We look forward to receiving your comments. Your contribution will help the USFWS make the best possible decision on protecting seabirds within the Oregon Islands National Wildlife Refuge, Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge, and adjacent mainland areas.

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References

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